

**Linda Clair**  
**Seven-day Meditation Retreat**  
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**Transcription from Audio Recordings**

**File 3d – Monday afternoon discussion**

Question: Sometimes I get to a point where it feels blank. I think I'm paying attention. There are thoughts but they're floating, they don't seem to stick. The state feels like it's just blank. I can hear the chopping (in the kitchen) then I become a bit bewildered by it, by the nothingness.

Linda: A bit overwhelmed by it?

Question: Confused.

Linda: Why confused?

Question: I don't know if that's the right word. It feels like I should be making progress, like paying more attention to sensations, whatever, following a technique.

Linda: You are, and that's why you're feeling that.

This is not anything like you think it's going to be. So when things like this happen you can tend to feel that you should do something with it or, "This is not it, this can't be it. This is not how I want it to be or how I expect it to be." And it isn't it, but it's much closer than probably most of the other things that you feel or experience, because it's an absence. And it's very difficult to get used to that absence and to even recognise and be in it, because you're so used to filling up that space with something, with the presence of something.

You can tend to feel that this whole thing is going to bring you more presence, that there's going to be more of things rather than less. So it's a bit of a surprise and shock – "What's going on?" – when it's just blank. What happens often when you feel like that is then you start to react to it and analyse it, rather than just leaving it and being in it. So as much as possible when that happens, and it will happen, just sit with it. Don't try and manipulate it or change it or fill it with anything. Just keep doing the practice. You see your reaction to it and come back to your body and feel it. Try not to worry about it, "Oh, is this how it's going to be. This is not so great." Just be with it.

Question: Earlier in the day I had been feeling strong determination. So when thoughts came up I would go, "I don't want that." And the blankness is what I was left with.

Linda: And it can be a slight thought in itself, a way of the mind undermining you saying, "Well this is how it is when I'm not here." And it's not – well, it sort of is but it's different, and it does take a long time to get used to it. So there are different degrees of it. But when it is like that just stay in it as much as you can. Don't try and attach to it but just try and be with it. Don't do anything with it or think it should be different.

Accept it. The absence becomes amazing in the end. But you don't recognise it at first because it's not something you can label or do anything with. It's just nothing and there can be a reaction to that. You really have to get used to not having your mind around. It's a difficult thing to do even though that's what we want. We don't want to be in its control and power. We don't want to be thinking all the time. But once it happens you go, "Oh, but this isn't how I wanted to feel." It can take time. It all takes time. Good.

Question: After that conversation about realisation this morning my mind's been going absolutely crazy about a realisation I had yesterday. And I think I've got to describe it briefly in order to be able to move on from it. In one of the sats yesterday I was getting some pain building up, which doesn't very often happen with me. I remembered hearing you say previous times to go as deeply into the pain as you can, or the sensation. So I dived in and I tried to keep my attention on the pain and let it be there and resist the superficial distractions away from it. Then for two or three seconds there was nothing except the sensation.

Linda: So there wasn't a reaction to the sensation?

Question: No, there was not even me there and it was no longer pain. I suppose there's a witness there to experience it. What happen then was a movement away from that place or whatever it was. And then I started to feel, or recognise, that I hadn't been there, that there was no me there. Then I started to recognise that that was scary, and I felt the energy of the mind and thinking pulling me out of it, and the pain of course came back.

I felt so many things you describe illustrated. I felt time coming back and registered there was no me, there was time and there was no thought. Of course this morning you reminded everybody it's good not to get attached to these things because they will tend to hang about – and it's been a terrific distraction all day. (laughter.) The repetition over and over again, so it's taken all my strength to not be sickened by all of that. (laughter) I felt it's not going to go away unless I say something.

Linda: Yes, it's better to say something. And even though I said that, sometimes it's almost impossible to let it go because something like that is very, very significant. And it will affect you whether you've spent the day thinking about it or not. It's something very deep because suddenly you know it is possible, and that's a huge thing. You know in you that it is possible and what I'm saying is true, it's not just this theory, it's not something I'm asking you to believe – you're actually practicing and then feeling and realising this is true: "Maybe she's telling the truth." That's a big thing, you just can't believe it's possible. I was the same, I trusted my teachers implicitly but I still didn't feel deep down that it was possible for me.

So it's when you have those realisations, you realise it is possible, and it is a big thing. So yes, you are going to (react), it's very difficult not to. So don't beat yourself about thinking about it because it's a huge thing. But now, let it go. Let it go down. After speaking about, that's the best thing to do, just talk about it – let it go.

The thing is, when something like that happens too, it's such incredible energy that you can't sustain it for long periods. And you don't know how long it was there because you couldn't register in the normal – normal, not natural – time-based state where you measure things by – usually emotionally,

and by minutes and hours – and suddenly that’s not happening. So it’s impossible to know that you’ve even really been in that state until you’re out of it, and then you realise that you were.

So don’t be scared. There’s nothing to be scared of. That’s another thing you realise, the fear is just a thought, like everything else, it’s just a thought. It’s an illusion. It feels very real. And I’m not saying not to feel it – you’re going to feel it – but it is not real.

Question: To let you know what’s been happening to me in the last while: at the December retreat I had a sense something happened. There was a lot of nausea and shaking that went on driving home and for about a week. At that time I did some significant damage to my back. Then over the last three months, every time it began to heal, either I did something stupid like digging compost, and there’d be another injury to my back. So I’ve been in considerable discomfort. Yesterday I had that nausea and shakiness happen and immediately I was struggling with going to sleep. This has happened all the years I’ve been sitting with you. It seems as soon as I touched whatever it was, then there’s a bit of me saying, “No, don’t go there.” I’ve got discomfort, and I’m not sleeping all that well because of that, but this seems to be a different order.

Linda: It’s quite normal not to sleep that well during a retreat as well.

Question: That’s been this whole three months.

Linda: Yes, it comes and goes.

Question: Something’s happening I guess, not comfortably.

Linda: No, it’s not comfortable. But if you wanted comfort you shouldn’t be here. ☺

Question: I never know why I’m coming. There’s just no question, no doubt about it.

Linda: Good. You’re here, that’s the important thing.

Question: I’ve been sitting with this query. I want to know the nitty gritty of what we’re doing here. I come back to the breath and back to the body. Is it through the thoughts that there can be a gap through which you can feel something deeper, bigger, faster? Is that what can happen sometimes?

Linda: That can happen but it’s not what I’m suggesting that you do. It’s more that you keep seeing when you’re thinking, seeing that movement into a thought, and if you realise you’ve been thinking, you see it, you come back to the body. Thinking is a habit; what we’re trying to do is break that habit. I know some people say look at the gap, and you go into the gap. It’s something that you can use sometimes, but I feel that this goes more deeply into it.

Just seeing beyond the thought is not enough. You have to go deeply into the source – into your body – and there lies the source of the desire to think. You need to get to the source of it rather than just staying on that more surface level where you see the thinking and every now and again there’s a gap and you go into that.

What we’re doing is changing our point of reference from thinking to the body. The body is not reality but it’s much more tangible than thinking, than any thought you can have. If you start to look

at thinking – where is it? what’s going on? – it usually disappears if you look closely enough. That’s what we’re doing: looking at thinking, realising how futile it is and how ridiculous it is, and without trying to say, “Okay, I’m going to stop thinking.” Just keep doing that practice of coming back to the body and using that as a reference point and an anchor here.

A lot of people talk about – well, they’re obsessed with – who they are and who they’re going to be and all that sort of stuff. But really, that’s not the question, it’s, “Where am I?” And I’m here – that’s what you’re establishing. But each time you think, you’re really pretending you’re somewhere else. It’s just a repetition of past experience, trying to make yourself feel secure because it’s so intense being here.

Deep down here you know that at the point of death it’s going to be now. You’re not going to be able to think you’re way out of it, it’s going to be now. And suddenly you’re going to be very awake and you’re not going to be able to avoid it – nobody can. So this is, in a way, accepting your own mortality by breaking down that thinking process. And each time you break it down and come back you’re a bit more here, a bit more here, until it becomes much more natural not to think than to think.

And the desire to think gradually weakens as the fear starts to break down. So the source of the desire to think, as I’ve said before, is fear. Fear drives it, fear of being here. You’re so scared to be here because you’re scared that you won’t exist, you’ll die. And part of you will die, that part that you think is you will go. That’s nothing to be scared about because that’s not reality, it’s not real.

So you’ll become truly authentic, truly here and there won’t be that incredible fear of death. In me it drove almost every action, every word I uttered, there was some degree of fear there. I wasn’t aware of it at the time but afterwards I was. And I found it incredible that I kept living in that state because there was so much tension and fear involved in it.

So it’s a gradual thing where you start to realise what this thinking process is all about, and how you don’t need it. And you gradually test little things like doing practical things without using your mind, and you start to realise, “Yes, I can do this without thinking. I can do that without thinking.” And gradual, gradually you realise you don’t really need to think to do almost anything. To be here I don’t need to think, to sit here. Yet I know before, there was this deep belief that I needed to think to survive.

So it’s not just going through the gap, it’s getting really deeply beneath the thinking process. To do that, to get some separation from it, the body is the most useful thing to use – in my experience it is.

Question: At the end of a retreat I often feel deeper, calmer, less attached. It’s like falling into a gap. I’m trying to understand what’s happening

Linda: You’ll never completely understand with your mind what’s happening. I didn’t understand at the time. That’s one of my jobs now, as it was my teacher’s jobs, to just say, “Trust me. Do this and see what happens.”

There’s a degree of logic in it. I saw the logic right at the beginning when people explained the process to me. Then it got a bit lost and I started to feel, “So what’s going on?” I just had to trust

someone, someone in the body – it needed to be like that, so I trusted this being who I knew was free. That’s why I was doing this, because I saw that’s what I wanted.

There was a deep degree of trust, but there was also trust in this practice, because I was doing things that he advised – I wasn’t just blindly following him. And with all my Japanese teachers there was this deep trust in the practice and the possibility that maybe this was possible for me. They kept reaffirming that and each time they said that something struck me, it did something to me, energetically I just felt, “Ah, this is possible!” So there is a degree of trust. And if you question it too much and analyse it too much it will just rationally seem crazy, sitting here for a week doing this.

So you’ll never fully understand it with your mind, you can only realise it. And when you have realisations like L. just described, then the trust really starts to deepen and then you feel, “Wow, maybe this is possible.” And then you start to feel this intense excitement, which is probably also what he felt and why he was thinking about it because the mind knew he was on to something. Yes, you can’t help but get excited at certain times during this practice. But trust is a big thing.

Question: I believe you because I’ve been meditating for a while now and already some things that really bothered me about my past have miraculously healed. So I do trust what you say. I trust the practice. I trust you.

Linda: And I’m not the only one saying it. (laughing)

Question: It’s working on a certain level so I just keep working at it.

Linda: Definitely, because I’ve seen such a huge change in you too – you’re so grounded now.

Question: A lot of the fear I used to have is gone, about certain events that have happened.

Linda: And that’s a miracle.

Question: I never thought that would ever happen and it happened. There’s still a long way to go but my question now is: when things start to open and there is the intensity coming into the body and the letting go of the past, there’s this point I reach where I just don’t know what’s going on, there’s this not knowing. In the past I’ve been able to find a reference point, “Ah, that’s where I need to be looking.” But lately there’s no place to go where I can sink my teeth into. It’s just...

Linda: A bit disorientating?

Question: A bit disorientating and intense. There’s a rumble in my body all the time, and sometimes it’s like an avalanche and other times subtle and finite. That’s been the past few months.

Linda: So use your breath if you can. If you can just be there without trying to know, just be there. Once the mind comes and you go, “Oh, what’s going on here?” use the sensations in your body to just help you get some reference point. And, as I was talking to M. earlier about, walking, a bit of food, doing something that you enjoy. Just to soften the whole thing can be good too, very grounding things, gardening. And you have contact with people, friends. Make sure you don’t isolate yourself too much too.

Question: It can be a bit isolating when it's intense. I can't exactly tell someone, if they ask how I'm going, that I'm feeling incredibly like an avalanche from head to toe and there's a lot of energy. (laughing) I'm just settling into that. It has felt a bit of a solo journey.

Linda: You just have to bluff it out. Say you just feel a bit tired or something, whatever, but don't say avalanche, (laughing) or, "There's no me there. I don't exist and neither do you." (laughing) Make sure you stay as grounded as you can.

Question: With acceptance, I remember you said your teacher said to accept everything. It's occurred to me that I have been able to accept some things. But little, ordinary things I realise I have resisted accepting, like the ordinariness of just being here, but also the intensity of being here. It's been hard to accept that as well. But today I realised, I had this thought that maybe it's okay, maybe it's okay to accept these parts as well, as part of it all.

Linda: Yes.

Question: But it's very scary at the same time. It's a funny feeling.

Linda: It's interesting because one feels so much fear at the prospect of not feeling any fear. And that's what the fear is all about, because there's not going to be any fear, and people are terrified of that. The fear is not real but it's the fear of not feeling fear. That's all it is. But I know it feels very real when you are feeling it, the prospect of letting go of everything you think is real and that makes you, you.

So also look at seemingly little things in your life like when you're socialising with someone and you say something and you go, "Oh, I shouldn't have said that!" Look at those little, more mundane things too. And it's interesting when you start to see how little you really accept in life.

Question: Yes, I've been judging everything.

Linda: This is good, this is bad.

Question: Going into judging everything as good or bad.

Linda: That's what thinking is all about – separating things out into good, bad, "I like this, I like that. I'm this sort of person, so I do this. I like these colours, I like those colours." It's not that you don't have any preferences in the end, you do, but really the preference don't matter anymore, whereas before they were really important. "I've got to have it this way and that way." But now it's like, "Yes, I'd like it this way but if doesn't happen, it doesn't happen, it doesn't really matter." Nothing really matters.

Question: There was a lot of effort involved in the sit and it was not really happening for the first half. It takes me a long while to get somewhere if you know what I mean. And there was a point at the end of that one where it was like that thing you talk about where consciousness speeds up. I was really hot, sweating, and not doing particularly much. The thoughts in between the breath, I could actually cut them off before they became full sentences.

Linda: Hmm, good.

Question: Am I deluding myself – is that just another aspect of the mind, are there layers and layers of that? Or is it a meaningful thing and part of the process?

Linda: That's part of the process – it's really good – so keep doing that. But there are layers and layers of that. So it becomes more and more subtle and more and more challenging. But you become faster. It's like you become faster and then you see more, and you have to stay really alert to see the little things popping up. But you want to see them because you get this inward momentum that builds up: the faster you get, the faster you get, and that becomes quite attractive. And you just do it, you want to do it, you naturally want to do it then.

Question: Oh, that's infinitely better than four or five breaths later realising, "Oh, what was I doing?"

Linda: Yes, so that inspires you and then you see that you can do it. And you start to challenge yourself and do it more, and put in more effort, because it does take effort. Eventually of course the whole thing is completely effortless, but leading up to that it takes an incredible amount of sustained effort. That's what a retreat like this is all about, a period of sustained effort, because you have to keep wearing it down and seeing it, come back. Then you'll have periods where, "Ah, this is good," and you enjoy it, but then even that takes a different sort of energy and you can't sustain it for very long, and then it comes back. So never assume the mind's gone. You can get to points where you go, "Ah, this is great! Please don't come back. Please don't come back," and then it does. (laughter)

Question: At the end of the last retreat I did with you, you said some of us may have to continue with the very forceful, intense breathing. I got into that as a way of getting into the body for a quite a while. But then it's bit like I'm desiring this particular feeling of being in the body so I dropped it, plus I'd had other things to deal with. It was a bit like breath work. Then I noticed one or two times it would happen without all the huffing and puffing, it would happen spontaneously.

Linda: But that did happen because of all the effort you put in previously.

Question: Maybe so, yes, because I could recognise these feelings. This morning's sit was magical in that way. It usually takes a while of gentle breathing to find that space. I'm a bit worried about this because it looks like I'm desiring things.

Linda: You have to though! You have to want it and desire it. Of course you can get too much into it, and then you need to change tactics. But really, you have to long for this, you have to want it. You have to desire something to even do this, but there are certain times when you can feel yourself just setting up this habitual pattern of behaviour where you do this in order to get this. But deep down, you're doing this in order to be free from this, from everything. So there has to be that there.

But at certain times during a particular sit you have to watch, because you sit there and you're looking for that space, and of course you want it but you're just sitting there completely open. You've got to really look at that, "I'm doing this to get that," thing.

It's more in the big picture that it's why you're here doing this – there has to be that longing. But in smaller periods like during a sit, just be careful you don't want immediate results. Be prepared to put in that work without wanting something immediately from it. It will happen, like you were

saying, you put in that effort and spontaneously feel that. That's what will happen when you least expect it, but it's still a result of the work that you put it.

It's like people saying the story about, "Looking at the moon in the water, and I was enlightened." People think it's because I was looking at the moon in the water and that's what made me enlightened. It wasn't. It was the twenty years of sitting facing the wall, and that just happen to be the moment! (laughter) You could have been looking at the back of a bus or something like that. (laughter) It has to happen at some time, and that just happened, and it sounds so romantic. But saying it happened when I look at the back of a bus – it doesn't sound so romantic.

Question: I like what you said to V. – there's just the work. That was pretty cool. I just get a bit worried about acceptance, accepting what's actually there, rather than the sign posts.

Linda: Well, there are sign posts. Don't worry about it. Just do it. It's not worth worrying about. Don't take it too seriously either. There's a light side to all this too. (laughing)